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# Papers show Bush fought to block probe of CIA

By Jim Mann  
*Los Angeles Times*

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — While he was director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Vice President Bush secretly battled with the Justice Department and White House officials in an effort to restrict a federal criminal investigation of senior CIA officials, according to newly released documents.

Citing the need to protect intelligence sources, Bush in October 1976 repeatedly sought to prevent some documents from being declassified and CIA witnesses from being called before a federal grand jury, the new material shows.

The grand jury was investigating charges that officials working for or with the CIA, including former CIA Director Richard Helms, had lied under oath to Congress about CIA operations in Chile during and after the 1970 election of Salvador Allende, a Marxist, as president of that country.

When White House officials reminded Bush that President Gerald R. Ford had already given a public pledge that his administration would not use the classification process or take any other action to prevent the exposure of illegal activities, Bush still balked, saying said he had not received any written directive from the President spelling out this policy.

The new information about Bush is contained in documents at the President Ford Library. Professional archivists there opened files kept by Ford's White House counsel, Philip W. Buchen, on Sept. 8. A Los Angeles Times reporter found them in the course of other research.

Writing to Ford in 1976, Buchen said, "An impasse exists between the Justice Department and Director George Bush of the CIA." Buchen told the President that failure to obtain the information in dispute "would abort the pending investigation and lead to no prosecution."

In a memo at the time to another

White House official, Bush said, "There is no intention on my part or on the part of this agency to take any action that might reasonably be construed as an effort to thwart or frustrate the investigation. ...

"At the same time, I mean to do whatever is necessary and appropriate to carry out my statutory mandate to protect intelligence sources and methods, believing as I do that such protection is at the heart of the agency's ability to function effectively."

Ford supported the Department of Justice and his White House aides, and instructed Bush to let federal prosecutors have what they needed. The Justice Department investigation eventually resulted in Helms' 1977 plea of no contest to two criminal charges of failing to testify "fully, completely and accurately" to Congress.

When asked for comment, Craig Fuller, Bush's current chief of staff, said through a spokeswoman that the vice president's office first heard of the Buchen files when questions were raised by the Times yesterday.

Bush's efforts as the CIA director contrasted sharply with those of his own immediate predecessor at the agency, William E. Colby. It was Colby who first referred to the Department of Justice the allegations of false testimony by CIA officials, thus leading to the criminal prosecution that Bush was seeking to restrict.

Bush's defense of clandestine operatives facing criminal charges has a modern echo. During his current campaign for the White House, Bush has expressed strong support for former national security adviser John M. Poindexter and former Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, who face federal criminal charges stemming from the secret sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of profits from these sales to the Nicaraguan contras. The vice president has said he hopes the two will be acquitted.

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